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Micaela Ramon

Translator: Maria Amélia Carvalho



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FARACO, C. A. (2016). *HISTÓRIA SOCIOPOLÍTICA DA LÍNGUA PORTUGUESA*. SÃO PAULO: PARÁBOLA EDITORA.

Micaela Ramon

História sociopolítica da língua portuguesa [Sociopolitical history of the Portuguese language] was published in 2016 by Carlos Alberto Faraco and constitutes a very important work by the renowned Brazilian linguist. At the time Faraco was the coordinator of the National Committee of Brazil with the Instituto Internacional da Língua Portuguesa (IILP) [International Institute of the Portuguese Language], an institution pertaining to the Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP) [Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries] whose goals, according to its statutes, consist in: “the promotion, safekeeping, enrichment and dissemination of the Portuguese language as a means of promoting culture, education, information and access to scientific, technologic knowledge, and officially used in international forums”¹.

Bearing in mind the author’s reputation both in the academic community, and in the decision-making circles associated to language policies, his work aroused significant interest and was translated in several reviews that have come to light, mainly in specialist journals, but also in other means of communication in Brazil. A similar reaction from other countries of the CPLP cannot be found as easily documented as the above. The publication, nonetheless, deserves close attention from all those interested in matters of language, its development, expansion, transformation and current status.

The title of the work enables us to foresee its contents. It is, in fact, a history of the Portuguese language accomplished, not from the point of view of internal linguistics, but rather adopting the perspective of external linguistics. The author himself, in the introductory text of the book, titled “Apresentação” [Introduction], clarifies the distinction between such concepts, while explaining the purposes that guided him during its accomplishment:

there are many perspectives through which one can research the history of a language. The most common one has been that which seeks to describe the changes of the different subsystems that constitute its structural organisation – its phonology, syntax, morphosyntax and lexicon. (...) That is not the subject of our book. (...) Our concern consisted in observing how the Romanic linguistic variety that emerged from the Latin spoken in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula (...) expanded south, occupying all the western strip of the Peninsula; and later, in the wake of the maritime expansion

¹ Retrieved from the statutes of the Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP) [Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries], available at http://www.cplp.org/Files/Filer/Documentos%20Essenciais/Estatutos_CPLP_REVLISo7.pdf

and Portuguese colonialism, how it left the European borders, settling in Asia, Africa and America and, today, is an international language. (pp. 9-10)

In the introductory text of “Apresentação”, some information is also provided about the method followed by Faraco. Such method is founded on the identification, selection and presentation of “a considerable part of the diversity of opinions and conceptions about the Portuguese language”, analysed and discussed in terms of the “suspicion and critique of narratives” (p. 10).

This is, thus, a work that does not dwell on the evolutions registered at the level of the Portuguese language structure as a sign system ruled by intrinsic operating rules, but rather a study that privileges the relations of language with their speakers in the course of the centuries, and in the multiple geographic spaces in which it is present. It is, therefore, a sociopolitical history of the Portuguese language.

Carlos Alberto Faraco organises his work (the outcome of reflections that gradually “took shape over the past ten or fifteen years as a result of [his] accidental or intentional involvement related to language policy matters” (p. 11), in two extensive chapters followed by a third one, considerably more concise, in which some key-ideas are systematised by way of a conclusion (“Conclusão”).

In the first chapter (pp. 14-225), entitled “História” [History], the author reviews the whole formation process of the Portuguese language, from its differentiation from the other “Romance dialects” (that is, the multiple “historic unfoldings of the so-called Vulgar Latin, in other words, the set of varieties of Latin spoken by the populations from the different regions of the Roman Empire”, p. 14) up to its dissemination throughout the other continents where the maritime travels accomplished by the Portuguese took it. In our view, three questions deserve particular focus in this chapter: 1) the formalisation of the language; 2) the linguistic consequences of the Portuguese expansion; and 3) the creation of the main instruments of fixation of its *corpus*.

With regard to the first question, the author shows how the gradual abandonment of Latin everywhere, and in Portugal as well, was motivated by eminently pragmatic questions, arising from the pressing communication needs that, for instance, since the reign of King D. Afonso II (1211-1223), led to the “increasing innovative juridical action and to the necessity to make laws known to an ever-growing number of people who [had motivated] the progressive substitution of Latin by the vernacular Romance language in the drafting of the documentation produced by the Royal Chancellery” (pp. 21-22). Identical motivations were the basis for the royal regulations produced either by king D. Manuel I (1498), or by king D. João IV (1656), in order to force the “physicians and surgeons” to “prescribe to the pharmacists, the purges, syrups and medicines they tell the sick to take using the Portuguese language, so that all of them would understand”. Accompanying the slow but inexorable process of privileged usage of the vernacular Portuguese language in all contexts that today may be considered institutional, Faraco documents its progressive “formalisation”, even though he assumes a critical positioning regarding what he considers to be the “pitfalls of anachronism (...) or triumphalism” that leads a

few “scholars of the history of Portugal and language historians” to “ascribe the gesture of transforming the ‘Portuguese’ language into the ‘official language’ of the reign to king D. Dinis, a change that would have occurred in 1296” (p. 23).

In the section devoted to the expansion of the Portuguese language, the author begins by synthesising the internationalisation process of this language in the following terms:

by the middle of the fifteenth century, in the wake of Portugal’s maritime expansion, the Portuguese language leaves its European borders and becomes an international language, with its speakers settling in enclaves along the western and oriental coastline of the African continent, reaching India in 1498, America in 1500, China in 1513, Timor in 1515 and Japan in 1534. (p. 57)

Once again, socioeconomic reasons extrinsic to the language itself, are pointed out to justify its success and implementation in foreign parts, distant from its point of origin:

they are the network structure, with relatively few people involved, and the naval supremacy resulting from the transportation of artillery on board the Portuguese ships (...) which may explain that a country with around two million inhabitants was capable of mastering, with no major competition, for nearly one century, the international maritime trade in the routes that covered the African coast and reached India, Malacca, Timor and Macao. (pp. 58-59)

The same reasons are invoked to explain the retrocession of the Portuguese presence from mid seventeenth century in Asian territories:

with the loss of the depots, the presence of the Portuguese language in Asia also retracted, as it wasn’t that extensive at the time of the Portuguese rule, taking into account that the population who spoke it as the first language had always been numerically low. (p. 59)

Yet, what stands out in the domain of the linguistic consequences of the “extra-European expansion of Portugal” is that it “enabled the Portuguese to establish contact with a countless number of African, Asian and American languages” (p. 62), hence resulting

the appearance of *pidgin* and creole languages of Portuguese base; the transformation of American indigenous languages into colonial languages (...); the emergence of the so-called non-native varieties, arising from the use of Portuguese as a second language (...); the consolidation in Brazil of a whole extra-European community in which the Portuguese language was hegemonically consolidated as a first language during the nineteenth century. (p. 63)

We believe it is relevant to add to this array of consequences (although this is not mentioned by the author), the alterations in the language itself, carried by the Portuguese, resulting from those multiple contacts that greatly contributed to the enrichment of the language through, for example, the incorporation of elements originating from several other languages with which Portuguese communicated, many of them absolutely indispensable for the nomination of the new realities unknown till then.

Finally, in the last section of the first chapter, Faraco reflects upon what he calls the “imaginary language”. Under this somewhat derogatory title, the author would make up the undertaken actions, firstly in Portugal, and from the nineteenth century onwards, in Brazil as well, on behalf of the fixation of the Portuguese language *corpus*. It is therefore by going back to the sixteenth century that Carlos Alberto Faraco highlights the appearance of the first grammar books, the first orthography treatises and the first dictionaries, works complemented by several “accolades” to the Portuguese language, produced by some of the most important figures of Portuguese Humanism, as João de Barros, Pero de Magalhães de Gândavo, António Ferreira or Camões.

Concerning this kind of works, Faraco takes on a dubious stance and, we believe, a contradictory one. If, on the one hand, he evaluates these initiatives which he considers as stages of the “construction process of the imaginary language with critical suspicion (...), with the writing of instruments that also sought to define an ennobled profile to it” (pp. 176-177), on the other hand, he joins the voices of those who regret that “Portuguese lexicography [is] one of the most modest among the great European languages” (p. 187). He regrets that there are so many and such frequent hesitations in terms of the stabilisation of an orthography of the Portuguese language, and that it hasn’t yet been possible to produce “an ecumenical grammar of the language” (p. 225) on the path towards the efforts embarked upon in a pioneering way by Celso Cunha e Lindley Cintra, in the last quarter of the twentieth century. In other words, although he questions the legitimacy of instruments that adopt and translate a “standardising vision that hovers over the specific and fluid diversity” (p. 177) of the language, however, he ends up by implicitly recognising the importance of those instruments as mechanisms that regulate language policies at the level of *corpus* definition, even criticising the relative lukewarmness and lack of coordination with which the different agents with responsibilities to do so perform in this domain.

The second chapter of the work (pp. 228-357), entitled “Rumo à lusofonia” [Towards Lusophony], is fully dedicated to that important question, and by reading it, we can observe the preponderance of the analyst commentator’s posture, committed to a certain vision about the identity representations of the Portuguese language that have been built and propagated over the centuries by the elites of its users.

Faraco’s first task is to dismantle the idea of “a Portugal greater than Portugal itself”. He does so through the speeches of the authors to whom we owe the construction of a mythical conception of Portugal as a country endowed with a natural supremacy, that would grant it a magnificent destiny amid the conclave of the world’s nations.

He begins his analysis by making reference to Padre António Vieira (Father António Vieira, the Jesuit missionary), an author who, despite not having become associated with

the “list of those who before and after him wrote accolades and pleas to the ‘wonders’ of language” (p. 235) through his notion of Portugal and the Portuguese as a kingdom and a people, chosen by God to found the empire of Christ on earth, paved the way for the theses of those who defend the existence of a supranational community built around the common language. Fernando Pessoa, who attributed the epithet of “Emperor of the Portuguese language” to Vieira, was the one who formulated “the thesis that the Fifth Empire will fundamentally be an empire incarnated in language, because it will not be a material empire, but rather, a cultural one” (p. 235). Agostinho da Silva joins him in defending the need to operate a “cultural and moral revolution as necessary and sufficient for the civilisational reconstruction that would result in a new time of peace, liberty, fraternity and abundance for the whole Humankind (...) to be constructed by the peoples who speak Portuguese” (p. 242).

A similar emphasis is given by Faraco to the theory of luso-tropicalism, advocated by Gilberto Freyre, founded on the idea that Portuguese tropicalism, because it was carried out “not by brute force, not by military power, not by technical superiority, not by economic craftiness, but through love, fraternal love” (p. 251), would have fostered the creation of a great community of peoples united by a common feeling of which language would be the direct manifestation.

Faraco sees both sides with scepticism, arguing (wisely, in our view) that no language is superior to other languages if analysed by purely linguistic criteria, and as such, Portuguese cannot claim to be a language “purer” than any other, and therefore destined to a civilising mission of other peoples. On the other hand, the author echoes the words of Eduardo Lourenço, supporting “the idea that the Portuguese coloniser, due to his plasticity, was the providential mediator between the European and the tropical exotic, is nothing but a mystification that *translates a cultural inferiority complex transfigured into a delirious apologia*” (p. 275).

However, according to the author, it is from these “peaks of pride”, though hardly sustainable when submitted to the practice of dispassionate analysis, that the bases for the creation of a Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) emerge. In its genesis, we find the thought of Agostinho da Silva [“Professor Agostinho (...) understood that it was important to build a policy of unity, of foundation of our common language. That was an approach which began to be undertaken, and which inclusively reached the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, CPLP” (p. 244), and the lucid analysis by Freyre about the polycentric character of the Portuguese language, “the same language, though with the most diverse languages – national, subnational, regional and popular – enriching, enlivening and moving that common language and that culture, simultaneously one and plural” (p. 265).

CPLP would effectively arise in 1996, assembling the then eight countries that spoke Portuguese as official language which, “appealing to the historic, cultural, linguistic aspects (...) they share, decide to congregate in an international organisation oriented to the accomplishment of three major goals: political-diplomatic concertation, cooperation in all domains and both promotion and dissemination of the Portuguese language” (p.

303). However, if the project had a fervent supporter in the president of the Portuguese Republic at the time – Mário Soares – it did not succeed in generating similar enthusiasm in the other partner countries that initially did not elect the community as one of the priorities of their external policies. Such an appraisal leads the Brazilian linguist to express a feeling of suspicion and dismay regarding the efficacy of CPLP, for considering that there are few “possibilities that CPLP will assert itself as an international organism beyond the sentimental rhetoric, even taking into account that there is an unexplored cooperation potential among the Portuguese speaking countries” (p. 308).

He expresses an even greater scepticism with regard to the concept of “Lusophony”. Affected by a prejudice common to other authors, equally adverse to the word and to the universe he evokes, Faraco defends that this is a term coined by the Portuguese to serve the interests of Portugal, “not [achieving] (...) resonances in the other Portuguese-speaking countries”, being “nearly inexistent in Brazil”, and “seen with great suspicions in the African countries” (p. 315); the author does not add information about its acceptance and presence in East Timor.

The arguments presented to justify the alleged inoperativeness and inadequacy of the term are essentially the following: 1) “it is an attempt to address the ‘nostalgia of the lost empire’”, functioning as “a revenge over the phenomenon known as decolonisation” (p. 320); 2) in the countries in which Portuguese is not the hegemonic national language, it may have a glottophagic effect; 3) it ignores the drift that Portuguese has been suffering in Portugal and in Brazil, which leads some linguists to consider that we are already dealing with two languages rather than only one with two different varieties.

Many reasons could be invoked to counteract such arguments. Consider, for example, that the first one would have us believe that the language legacy was an imposition of the former coloniser and not a free and autonomous choice of the self-determined peoples; the second overlooks the rights laid down in the laws of the different countries about national languages and policies undertaken for the implementation of bilingual curricula in the African countries and in Timor; the last one hypostatizes differences that actually exist mainly at the level of oral speeches, however not taking into account the confluences that are soon imposed when the written code is considered.

Another fallacy that is widely evoked, and which Faraco also points out, is that “Lusophony” refers to “the language of the Portuguese” and not to the “language of those who speak Portuguese”. In this regard, it is to be recalled the theory of the “concentric circles”, proposed by Braj Kachru for the reality of English, which equally applies to the Portuguese language that belongs to the vast community for whom it is the L1 – *inner circle* (Portugal and Brazil), L2 – *outer circle* (remaining countries of the CPLP) or FL – *expanding circle* (the communities where it is recognised as an international language, though without a differentiated social statute) (pp. 343-344).

As a result of the demographic dynamics and growing interest that the Portuguese language has aroused among communities in which it does not have any official statute, the stability of these circles tends to be altered, envisaging the fact that in countries like Angola and Mozambique the number of speakers of Portuguese as L1 will increase,

while at the same time, the core of those that speak it as FL continues to expand. These reasons would justify “hope for the Portuguese-speaking world”. It is under this title, worded as a question, that Faraco presents his conclusions.

Although he still emphasises the relevance attributed to the fact that Portuguese is spoken by more than 250 million people, envisioning twice as many speakers till the end of the century (p. 361), the author still alerts to the main challenges that are posed to the affirmation of Portuguese as a polycentric language, shared by vast geographically distant and socio-economically heterogeneous communities. In conclusion, he states that

the effective international future prominence of the Portuguese language in the galaxy of languages will depend on the substantial improvement of the socio-economic and cultural indices by the societies that speak it; how they refine their economies; how they develop their ‘*graphic reservation*’ resources (...); and, lastly, how they project themselves as an international political reference of a set of fundamental values for Humanity, such as peace, democracy, justice, equitable distribution of wealth, and environmental balance. (p. 367)

This *História sociopolítica da língua portuguesa* [Socialpolitical history of the Portuguese language], combining academic research instruments and methods that make the author analytically check several documental sources referred in a vast bibliography, with a critical positioning that is translated in the presentation and protection of personal viewpoints which, whether one agrees with them or not, the author substantiates and justifies, undoubtedly constitutes a useful and pleasant reading, not only for linguists and social scientists, but also for an unskilled audience who is interested in knowing the evolution of the Portuguese language and its different dynamics in the spaces and contexts in which it is used, whatever its statute. ✍

Translation: Maria Amélia Carvalho

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Micaela Ramon is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Portuguese and Lusophone Studies at the Institute of Letters and Humanities of the University of Minho, where she teaches Portuguese Literature and Portuguese as a Foreign Language in undergraduate, postgraduate and extension courses. She has a degree in Portuguese-French teaching, a master in Portuguese Language and Literature teaching and a PhD in Portuguese Literature. She is a researcher at the Center for Humanistic Studies at the University of Minho (CEHUM). She also collaborates with the Center for Literatures of Portuguese Expression at the University of Lisbon (CLEPUL) in several projects. She is the director of the Master’s Degree in Portuguese Non-Maternal Language and deputy director of CEHUM. She is the author of the book *Os sonetos amorosos de Camões* [The loving sonnets of Camões] and of the volume II of the *Obra completa. Padre António*

Vieira. Sermão da sexagésima e sermões da Quaresma [Complete work of Father António Vieira. Sermon of the sixtieth and lenten sermons], and of several chapters and articles published in books, magazines and meeting's papers, both national and international, on topics related to the areas in which she researches and teaches.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2193-4075>

Email: micaelar@ilch.uminho.pt

Address: Instituto de Letras e Ciências Humanas da Universidade do Minho, Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga

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